

We are faculty members and academic librarians at the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg and L'Université de Saint-Boniface writing to urge the Winnipeg Public Library's (WPL's) Millennium Library to reconsider the introduction of airport-style security screening. These new procedures were introduced with little prior notice on 25 February of this year. Since then, Winnipeggers who go to the Millennium Branch to borrow a book, use public Wi-Fi, attend a lecture or language class, or warm up in the early spring cold have had to navigate a screening process that involves metal detector wands, bag-searches, pat-downs, and confiscation of personal property. As academics who live, teach, and research in the city of Winnipeg, we find this security screening inimical to goals of public libraries, to the city's stated goals of reconciliation, and a worrisome departure from evidence-based policy and decision-making.

The WPL dates to 1904, and its current mission statement is "To enrich the lives of all Winnipeg citizens and their communities by providing high quality, responsive and innovative library services." The emphasis on "all citizens" is key here. The WPL, like public libraries across Canada and globally, has at its core the goal of wide and indeed comprehensive public accessibility. The new security procedures adopted at the Millennium Library last month run contrary to this basic, and abiding, goal. A wide range of people might reasonably find the new procedures invasive, demeaning, time-consuming, and, as a direct result, exclusionary. People experiencing homelessness who necessarily travel with their personal effects will find the searches and confiscations an especially costly bar to clear. The promise to make lockers available to patrons remains unfulfilled and, in any case, will only address some of these concerns.

Research shows that across Canada, Indigenous, Black, racialized people are more closely monitored and policed by public and private security services, such as the one employed by the WPL. In 2017, Winnipeg adopted an Indigenous Accord, describing as a "living document" and a critical step forward toward Reconciliation. The Millennium Library has played an important role here. In 2015, it opened two specifically designed spaces for Indigenous resources. It regularly hosts storytelling, Indigenous knowledge keepers, and language classes. It has a sacred medicine garden. Regardless of intentions, the Millennium Library's new security policy will particularly effect the over 90 000 Indigenous residents of Winnipeg. The adaptation represents a serious retreat from the City of Winnipeg's and the WPL's commitments to working toward making a city that welcomes and celebrates its Indigenous citizens and grapples with ongoing histories of racism and colonization.

The fact that the Millennium Library is the first and so far, only library in Canada to adopt these security policies reflects the basic fact that they are not supported by research. Studies of public safety overwhelmingly indicate

that increased security procedures of the like adopted at the Millennium Library does not translate into decreased violence or violent incidents. Elaborate and costly screening protocols do not, and cannot, substantially address library workers' or patrons' legitimate concerns for safety. Library workers' basic rights, including the need for a safe workplace, are not served by these screening procedures.

As faculty members at the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba, we have studied in the Millennium Library, given public lectures, hosted conferences and held book launches there. The Millennium Library has played a key role in the intellectual and cultural life of this city, and we are saddened to see it diminished by the hasty and poorly conceived policy that is likely to double-down on the fault-lines of a city that remains divided between rich and poor, Indigenous and settler, newcomer and established.

On 4 April 2019, the City of Winnipeg's Standing Committee on Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks voted to evaluate the Millennium Library's security screening policy and consult with effected committees. We commend this decision, and join with the voices of librarian Brianne Selman ([https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTwhdVLQIObiAgtSBem9dC1c8MWR1Cs1hQVTUZbPWoeVxVhNs4oIXL3YBH82skEnn73ZFvxgp7NCKla/pub?fbclid=IwAR0SedIOPsVLNCyQ8QoNTQUAdD7ZNiUSNjCyPzqU9uht\\_r97pt-ZSnHOb7A](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTwhdVLQIObiAgtSBem9dC1c8MWR1Cs1hQVTUZbPWoeVxVhNs4oIXL3YBH82skEnn73ZFvxgp7NCKla/pub?fbclid=IwAR0SedIOPsVLNCyQ8QoNTQUAdD7ZNiUSNjCyPzqU9uht_r97pt-ZSnHOb7A))

and the community group Millennium for All to urge the WPL to seriously reconsider its recent policy. Instead, seriously consider alternatives, including increasing staffing at the Millennium Library, engaging in meaningful consultation with users and staff about safety and resources, and providing effective social services and supports, including those that reduce the harms and risks associated with addictions and mental health. Libraries are places of community and learning, and we support Millennium Library that is part of the solution to the difficulties of life in Winnipeg in 2019, rather than yet another problem.

Signed, 19 April 2019

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